

Message Text

SECRET

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41

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 020304

O R 081640Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4922

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 0034

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MASS SS MR AG MO

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MAURITANIAN REQUEST FOR ARMS

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 2640 (NOTAL) USDAO DAKAR 021030Z JAN 76
STATE 4247

1. ACTING MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SIDI OULD CHEIKH 'ABDALLAHI, SUMMONED ME JANUARY 7 TO REQUEST USG ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING US-MADE HEAVY MACHINE GUNS AND AMMUNITION. AFTER NOTING THAT GIRM HAS RECENTLY OBTAINED ARMS FROM MOROCCO AND FRANCE, MINISTER STATED THERE REMAINS MAJOR GAP IN EQUIPMENT OF MAURITANIAN ARMED FORCES. GIRM THEREFORE WISHES TO OBTAIN TWO HUNDRED 50 CALIBER MACHINE GUNS PLUS "TEN UNITS OF FIRE" (TWO MILLION ROUNDS) OF 50 CALIBER (12.7 MILLIMETER) AMMUNITION. MINISTER STATED GIRM ARMED FORCES ALREADY HAVE NUMBER OF US-MADE 50S, SO TROOPS ALREADY KNOW HOW TO USE AND MAINTAIN WEAPON. BUT GIRM HAS BEEN HAVING DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING AMMO. MINISTER NOTED THAT CHIEF OF STAFF HAD MENTIONED MAURITANIAN REQUIREMENT TO VISITING DATT LAST WEEK. SINCE REQUIREMENT FOR WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION IS URGENT, GIRM WANTS TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT PORTION (ONE-QUARTER TO ONE-HALF) AIRLIFTED

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ASAP.

2. MINISTER FORMALLY REQUESTED USG GRANT AID. HE DECLARED, HOWEVER, THAT GIRM WAS PREPARED AS DISTINCT SECOND CHOICE TO PURCHASE NEEDED EQUIPMENT FROM US MANUFACTURER AND WOULD PROCEED TO DO SO IF USG WAS UNABLE PROVIDE GRANT AID.

3. AFTER MAKING FORMAL REQUEST FOR ARMS AID, MINISTER OUTLINED BACKGROUND OF GIRM DECISION AND PROVIDED FOLLOWING EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION. UNTIL RECENTLY, NORTHWEST CORNER OF AFRICA WAS IN STATE OF GENERAL POLITICAL BALANCE. DESPITE WIDELY DIFFERING VIEWS OF WORLD AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF ECONOMY, STATES OF REGION MANAGED TO GET ALONG. NOW, HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF GIRM, ALGERIA HAS DECIDED TO UPSET BALANCE AND TO TRANSFORM AREA INTO "ZONE OF COMBAT BETWEEN 'REVOLUTIONARIES' AND 'REACTIONAIRES'". 'ABDALLAHI POINTED OUT THAT ALGERIA HAD RECEIVED MASSIVE SHIPMENTS OF NEW ARMS FROM SOVIETS IN RECENT WEEKS WHICH HAVE BEEN POSITIONED IN TLEMCEM/ORAN REGION IN NORTH AND IN SOUTH AROUND TINDOUF. GIRM HAS FIRM INFORMATION, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THERE ARE TWO NEW SAM-2 UNITS IN ALGERIA, AND THAT THERE ARE SOVIET "ADVISORS" IN TINDOUF.

RVRM ACCORDING TO 'ABDALLAHI, GOA DECISION TO BEGIN ACTIVELY TO UPSET BALANCE WAS TAKEN VERY SOON AFTER PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH'S PUBLIC STATEMENT DURING PARIS STATE VISIT (DECEMBER 2-5) THAT REAL SAHARANS--RESIDENTS OF SAHARA PLUS THEIR KINSMEN IN MAURITANIA AND POSSIBLY MOROCCO AND ALGERIA--IF LEFT TO THEMSELVES WOULD EVOLVE WORKABLE COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO SAHARA PROBLEM IN SIX MONTHS. IN VIEW GIRM, GOA IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED ALLOUT EFFORT TO PREVENT EVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL ARAB COMPROMISE, AND INITIATED SERIES OF BLOWS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO CAUSE COMPLETE RUPTURE BETWEEN SAHARA AND MAURITANIA. THUS: ITEM--FOUR CROSS BORDER ATTACKS BY ALGERIAN-LED POLISARIO AGAINST BIR MOGHREIN, CHOUM TUNNEL AND TWO VILLAGES ALONG IRON ORE RAILROAD DURING EARLY DECEMBER; ATTACKS ON NOUADHIBOU FROM LA GUERA MID-DECEMBER; NEW YEAR'S EVE ATTACK

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ON ZOUERATE (AND NOW, JANUARY 6 ATTACK ON VILLAGE NORTH OF FDERIK). ITEM: GOA IS TRAINING 4000 POLISARIO "VOLUNTEERS" AROUND TINDOUF RECRUITED FROM SUBGROUP OF REGUIBAT TRIBE WHICH IS RESIDENT IN ALGERIA. ITEM: GOA HAS MOUNTED INTENSE PRESSURE ON POLISARIO MEMBERS TO SPEAK OUT AND TAKE DECISIVE ACTION AGAINST MAURITANIA. RADIO ALGIERS INTERVIEWS WITH POLISARIO PERSONNEL CLEARLY SHOW POLISARIO AD-

HERENTS WERE COERCED INTO MAKING STATEMENTS ON AIR AGAINST MAURITANIA. FACT THAT SOME POLISARIO HAVE ATTACKED MAURITANIA ORALLY IN ITSELF INDICATES ALGERIAN PRESSURE: MEN WHO RUN GIRM KNOW THESE POLISARIO MEMBERS AND KNOW THEIR VIEWS. "WE ARE ALL SAME PEOPLE". IN PAST, POLISARIO ADHERENTS ACKNOWLEDGED MAURITANIANS AND SAHARANS WERE ONE PEOPLE, BUT NEVERTHELESS WANTED GREATER DEGREE OF POLITICAL IDENTITY AND HENCE A SEPARATE STATE. EVEN MOST OUTSPOKEN, HOWEVER, NEVER ATTACKED THEIR KINSMEN ACROSS THE ARTIFICIAL SAHARA FRONTIER. ITEM: STRIDENT ALGERIAN RADIO AND PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST MAURITANIA AND VILIFICATION OF ITS LEADERS (TO WHICH GIRM AS MATTER OF POLICY HAS NOT AND DOES NOT INTEND TO RESPOND) ARE OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO SET SAHARANS AGAINST MAURITANIANS. ITEM: WHILE MANY MEMBERS OF SAHARA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WENT WILLINGLY AND HAPPILY TO ALGIERS, SOME WENT ONLY AT GUNPOINT. ITEM: GOA IS HARD AT WORK ROUNDING UP "REVOLUTIONARIES" AND MILITANTS TO OPPOSE MAURITANIA AND MOROCCO. MINISTER NOTED EXPLICITLY GENERAL GIAP HAD SIGNED UP PRECEDING DAY IN ALGIERS.

5. 'ABDALLAHI CONCLUDED PRESENTATION WITH STATEMENT THAT GIRM MUST HAVE HEAVY MACHINE GUNS TO PROTECT ITS ECONOMIC LIFELINE, 600 KILOMETER IRON ORE RAILROAD. IN ADDITION, GIRM HOPES THAT BY SHOWING STRENGTH AND DETERMINATION (THUS OVERCOMING ITS PAST IMAGE OF MILITARY WEAKNESS), IT WILL BE ABLE TO DETER ATTACKS.

6. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION "HOW DOES GIRM SEE SAHARA CONFRONTATION EVOLVING OVER NEXT TWO, SIX MONTHS?", MINISTER POINTED OUT FIRST THAT PRINCIPAL

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O R 081640Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4923

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

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UNKNOWN IS WHETHER THERE WILL BE WAR BETWEEN ALGERIA AND MOROCCO. ALL GIRM CAN ATTEST TO AT MOMENT IS THAT MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT IS WORKING HARD TO AVOID CONFRONTATION. IF THERE IS NO WAR, GIRM BELIEVES SAHARA PROBLEM WILL BE LARGELY SORTED OUT IN NEXT FEW WEEKS. GOM AND GIRM IN VERY NEAR FUTURE WILL BE EXTENDING AND CONSOLIDATING THEIR TAKEOVER OF ENTIRE SAHARA TERRITORY. GRADUALLY THEREAFTER, GREAT MAJORITY OF SAHARANS WILL SETTLE DOWN INTO NEW POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. 'ABDALLAHI NOTED SAHARAN IS POLITICALLY VOLATILE: HE CAN EASILY ALTER HIS POSITION OR EVEN SWITCH SIDES FROM ONE DAY TO NEXT AS HE RECALCULATES HIS INTERESTS AND REASSESSES ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF A PARTICULAR ALIGNMENT. ACCORDING TO MINISTER, THIS PROCESS IS ALREADY UNDERWAY IN AL-AYOUN/SMARA/BU CRAA TRINAGLE. UNQUESTIONABLY GUERRILLA ATTACKS ON NEW SAHARA AUTHORITIES AND COMMANDO RAIDS ACROSS OLD BORDER WILL CONTINUE, BUT WITH DECREASING FREQUENCY. SETTLING DOWN PROCESS WILL ALSO BE AIDED BY REALIZATION THAT SOLUTION ENVISAGED IN TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT WAS ACCEPTED BY LARGE UN MAJORITY AS SENSIBLE SOLUTION, AND THAT POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESSFUL APPEAL TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DIMINISHES AS PASSAGE OF TIME DEMONSTRATES
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TO UN MEMBERS THEY WERE RIGHT TO SUPPORT PARTITION FORMULA. MINISTER NEATLY "FORGOT" TO EXAMINE OTHER HALF OF HIS SCHEMA: WHAT IF THERE IS WAR.

7. IN RESPONSE, I TOLD SIDI I VERY MUCH DOUBTED USG WOULD RESPOND FAVORABLY TO GIRM REQUEST FOR GRANT ARMS AID, NOTING THAT MAP HAS ENJOYED LESS AND LESS FAVOR OF LATE. I POINTED OUT IN ADDITION THAT OUTRIGHT PURCHASE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE VERY MUCH FASTER SINCE ONLY STEPS IN PURCHASE ARE SIGNATURE OF CONTRACT WITH SUPPLIER AND ACQUISITION OF EXPORT LICENSE FROM DEPARTMENT'S OFFICE OF MUNITIONS CONTROL. THUS IF GIRM IS ANXIOUS TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF WEAPONS AND AMMO IN PLACE BY EARLY FEBRUARY, PURCHASE ROUTE MAY WELL BE ONLY REAL OPTION.

8. MINISTER CLOSED MEETING WITH STATEMENT THAT HE

PLANNED TO INFORM AMBASSADOR OULD 'ABDALLAH OF
APPROACH TO USG TO PERMIT AMBASSADOR TO FOLLOW UP
IN WASHINGTON.

9. COMMENT: I WOULD HOPE THAT U.S. WOULD AGREE
QUICKLY TO SUPPLY WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION TO MAURI-
TANIAN ARMED FORCES AND ARRANGE TO GET SIGNIFICANT
PORTION ON ROUTE WITHIN FOUR WEEKS. GIRM NEED IS
REAL AND URGENT: WEAPONS DESIRED WOULD APPEAR TO BE
SENSIBLE CHOICE IN TERMS OF REQUIREMENTS, TERRAIN,
AND MILITARY ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY; QUANTITIY IS MODEST.
PROMPT AND FAVORABLE RESPONSE WILL WITHOUT QUESTION
ENHANCE MAURITANIAN ASSESSMENT OF U.S., ITS ROLE
IN WORLD, AND ITS OBJECTIVES. FAVORABLE RESPONSE
COULD ALSO ENHANCE OUR ABILITY TO FIND COMMON GROUND
WITH GIRM ON RANGE OF BILATERAL AND INTERNATIONAL
PROBLEMS, AND DEVISE WAYS TO PURSUE COMMON GOALS.

THE CASE FOR RESPONDING FAVORABLY TO GIRM RE-
QUEST FOR GRANT AID IS MUCH LESS PERSUASIVE. GIEN
EXISTING AND PROBABLE FUTURE POLITICAL CONTEXT (GIRM
MEMBERSHIP IN THIRD WORLD AND ITS STANCE ON MID-EAST,
PALESTINIANS, KOREA, ETC.), I DOUBT THAT GRANT OF
200 50S WOULD BUY US MUCH MORE UNDERSTANDING AND EF-
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FECTIVE SUPPORT THAN FAR LESS EXPENSIVE FACILITATION
OF PURCHASE, LICENSING, AND RAPID SHIPMENT OF EQUIP-
MENT DESIRED. SECOND, SALE OF ARMS WILL PRESUMABLY
INCUR LESS WRATCH AMONG OTHER SAHARA PLAYERS (SPECI-
FICALLY POLISARIO SAHARANS AND ALGERIANS) THAN GRANT
AID. THIRD, MAURITANIA'S EASTERN ARAB FRIENDS (JORDAN,
SAUDI ARABIA, QATAR, ET AL) CAN EASILY FOOT ENTIRE
GIRM MILITARY BILL. FOURTH, GIRM SHOULD CONTINUE TO
LOOK TO FRANCE AS ITS PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF ARMS AND
MILITARY TRAINING. TREATING PRESENT REQUEST AS STRAIGHT
COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION WILL DISCOURAGE ANY POTENTIAL
TENDENCY TO LOOK TO U.S. IN MILITARY AREA. FIFTH, U.S.
INSISTENCE ON PURCHASE WILL DISCOURAGE ANY FOLLOW-ON
REQUESTS FOR LARGE QUANTITIES OF OVERLY-COMPLICATED
MILITARY HARDWARE, AND MAY CONTRIBUTE TO REALISTIC
ASSESSMENT BY GIRM LEADERSHIP OF TRUE COST OF ITS
SAHARA POLICY. SIXTH, WHILE I APPRECIATE AND
RESPECT GIRM DESIRE TO PRESERVE ITS DEVELOPMENT EFFORT
INTACT AND HENCE TO AVOID TRKFSFER OF RESOURCES TO NON-
ECONOMIC MILITARY BUILDUP AND ACTIVITIES, I BELIEVE
U.S. CAN BETTER DEMONSTRATE ITS SUPPORT OF MAURITANIAN
DEVELOPMENT BY MAKING U.S. RESOURCES AVAILABLE DIRECTLY
TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFORT.

DEPENDING ON TOTAL VALUE OF MATERIEL DESIRED, PERHAPS APPROPRIATE GOLDEN MEAN WOULD BE A SALE ON CON-
CESSIONARY CREDIT TERMS. THIS FORMULA WOULD PRESERVE
ABOVE ADVANTAGES OF SALE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY RECOG-
NIZING AND MEETING GIRM'S UNDERSTANDABLE NEED FOR
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE THROUGH SHORT AND MID-TERM.

WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ELABORATION RE EQUIPMENT
OR ABILITY OF GIRM FORCES TO ASSIMILATE WEAPONS OR
ANY TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS/CLARIFICATIONS USDAO DAKAR
MAY WISH TO PROVIDE.HANDYSIDE

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